VI. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Family

594 The Tanala family consists of a man, his wife or wives and their children. Among the Menabe the father is, in theory, the absolute head of the family with authority over the persons and property of not only his own children but his sons' children as well. Actually his authority varies with his personality and I even found a few cases in which fathers had been deserted by their children and reduced to want. Sons are not considered heads of families until after their father's death. Among the Ikongo authority over the children seems to be vested in the mother, while control of the family property is vested in the father. Such a condition might easily arise in a group which was in transition from a matriarchal system with communal [591] ownership to a patriarchal one with individual ownership. In both groups the whole family, including married sons, normally lives together in part of the ward belonging to their lineage (see The Village).

592 595 Although no exact figures are available, at least two-thirds of the Menabe families seem to be monogamous. Polygyny is common, but is only possible to a man with some wealth and social prestige. Among the Ikongo, polygyny is somewhat commoner, but by no means universal. In both cases each wife has her own house, built by the husband at the time of their marriage. In all but two or three of the Menabe gentes the husband must spend one day with each wife, in regular rotation. On that day he assists her and sleeps in her house. If he stays with one wife on another's day, the injured wife is entitled to divorce with alimony (see Divorce). She usually waives this, but the husband must make her a public apology and a substantial present. Among the Ikongo, who hold land individually, each wife is assigned a share of the husband's land. He has to help her to cultivate this on her day, while she feeds herself, her children, and the husband while with her, from its produce. The first wife is called the *Vady Be*, the second *Vady Iro*, and the third *Vady Maray*. There is no special term for additional wives and a man rarely has more than three. The *Vady Be*, who is always the first wife married, is superior to the others socially and helps the husband to administer the family finances. Often she holds the family purse for current expenses and the others, including the husband, have to apply to her for money. Wives pride themselves on economy and good manage-

I. Lesson S-5 (1956-57) 1958 FTS Tanala FTS

ment and money is never disbursed without a long argument. The husband keeps most of his belongings in the *Vady Be's* house and considers it his real home. 595 592

In spite of the separate housing for the wives and married sons, the Tanala family is well integrated. It is customary for the entire group to eat together in the house where the father is on that day and cooking is done in rotation. The wives aid each other in all their activities, look after each other's children, etc. There can be no doubt that polygyny does a great deal to lighten the labor of the women and they are quite as much in favor of it as the men.

The family is normally patrilocal, but among the Menabe a strong and rich family may insist that their women continue to live with them after marriage. In this case the husband comes to the wife's village or ward in the village, builds the new house there, and assists the men of her lineage in working their common land. Widows with children continue to live with their husband's family or lineage and if they remarry the new husband is usually compelled to come and live with them. This is to safeguard the children, who might otherwise be slighted or abused by their stepfather. Under the matrilocal arrangement the father has little authority in the family and the children feel more closely bound to their mother's lineage than to their father's. It is considered rather disgraceful for a man to consent to live with his wife's kin and ordinarily only one who is poor or of little account will do so. 591 [556]

THE LINEAGE

I have chosen this term to designate a relationship group which is very important in Tanala social and economic life. It is intermediate between the family proper and the larger units of village and gens. The lineage is composed of the recent descendants of one man and his wife or wives, tracing in the male line. Attached to it, but not altogether a part of it, are the wives of lineage members, children of lineage women whose marriages have been matrilocal and, in many cases, one or more families of hereditary slaves. 596

The lineage might be described as either an expanded family or an embryonic gens. The natives themselves take the former view and use the same term for it as for the family, but it is much larger than a family in the European sense, often numbering as many as seventy-five to one hundred persons. At the same time, it differs from a true gens in the closer blood relationship existing between members, its closer social and economic integration and its rather transitory nature.